

FIRST NATION PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF A SCHOOL NUTRITION POLICY

Christina Davey, University of Alberta
Jody Kootenay, Alexander Research Committee

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Policy Background

- Kipohtakaw Education Centre (KEC) in Alexander First Nation: a rural, Cree Nation located in Alberta, Canada
- Implemented a school nutrition policy (SNP) as a strategy to improve nutrition for children
- Free breakfast and hot lunch programs



<http://www.alexanderfn.com/kec.html>

Study Design

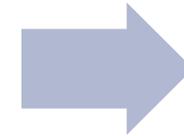
Objective: to explore parents' perceptions of barriers to and facilitators of SNP implementation in a First Nations school in Alberta.

Community based participatory research

- Collaborative and equitable partnership
- Alexander Research Committee (ARC)

Quantitative phase

- Cross-sectional survey
- **n=83, 66.4%**
- Analyzed for response frequencies



Qualitative phase

- Survey data used to develop interview guide
- **n=10**
- Analyzed using conventional content analysis
- Member checking

Results: Key facilitators

1. Support for the policy

- 95%: it is a good idea for the school to have a nutrition policy
- 93%: it is important for children to have healthy food choices at school
- 71%: it is important for children to have traditional foods

- *"You've got my back. I've seen the nutrition here in the school. We have to take a stand somewhere because our kid's future is at stake here. Do we want them to have an unhealthy community, or a healthy community? Hopefully the kids will catch on and they'll take those ideas home to their parents and say "I don't want you to buy this, I want you to buy this."*

Results: Key facilitators

2. Support for school's role in food provision

- *"I think that if they're going to be providing hot lunch for the kids, it makes a big difference because not a lot of kids pack lunches. Not a lot of families can afford to pack lunches for their kids. **If you're going to be feeding them, why not have it be nutritional?**"*
- *"**I think that's my favorite thing about this school.** Not only is it a fantastic, wonderful thing that they have hot lunch and that they have breakfast, but **that it's healthy on top of that is just even better.** Especially with a lot of people that can't afford to buy lunch every day."*

Results: Key barriers

1. Lack of support for guidelines concerning celebrations and fundraisers

- “Only healthy foods should be served...”
 - in the school breakfast and hot lunch: 82%
 - at school fundraisers: 78%
 - at school and classroom celebrations: 68%
- *“I don’t think [kids] should be denied that treat...Like you know “hey we’re having a celebration, you guys did good, go ahead have a cookie.” **Just because we’re trying to promote good health doesn’t mean we have to deny them...If you start denying them stuff like that then what are they celebrating?”***

Results: Key barriers

2. Inadequate communication

- 83% knew that the school had a nutrition policy
- 60% agreed that the school was doing a good job of letting parents know about its health programs and activities
- *“The only thing that I’m aware of that has to do with the nutrition policy here is that they try and incorporate wild meat in the menu. That’s about all I know.”*

Results: Key barriers

3. Cost and accessibility of healthy food

- *"It's more expensive to eat healthy...and **the grocery stores aren't convenient**. They're not like right there in our backyard, so it is a trip to the store."*
- *"You know the price of groceries has gone up so much and let's be completely honest here, **processed food is way cheaper** than the fruits and vegetables and everything else that's healthy, right?"*

Conclusions

- Parents are generally supportive of the SNP and recognize its beneficial impact on their children and the community
- Policy implementation may be undermined by parents' perceptions of appropriate foods to be served at special events, and lack of knowledge about policy changes
- Successful SNP implementation requires an inclusive policy development and implementation process that involves parents
- The broader socioeconomic challenges that First Nations parents face also need to be addressed

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THANK YOU

Questions?

Christina Davey: cdavey@ualberta.ca

Jody Kootenay: jodykootenay@gmail.com